

The President's Daily Brief

24 April 1971



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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Laotian Government irregulars consolidate hold on three positions overlooking Luang Prabang airfield.
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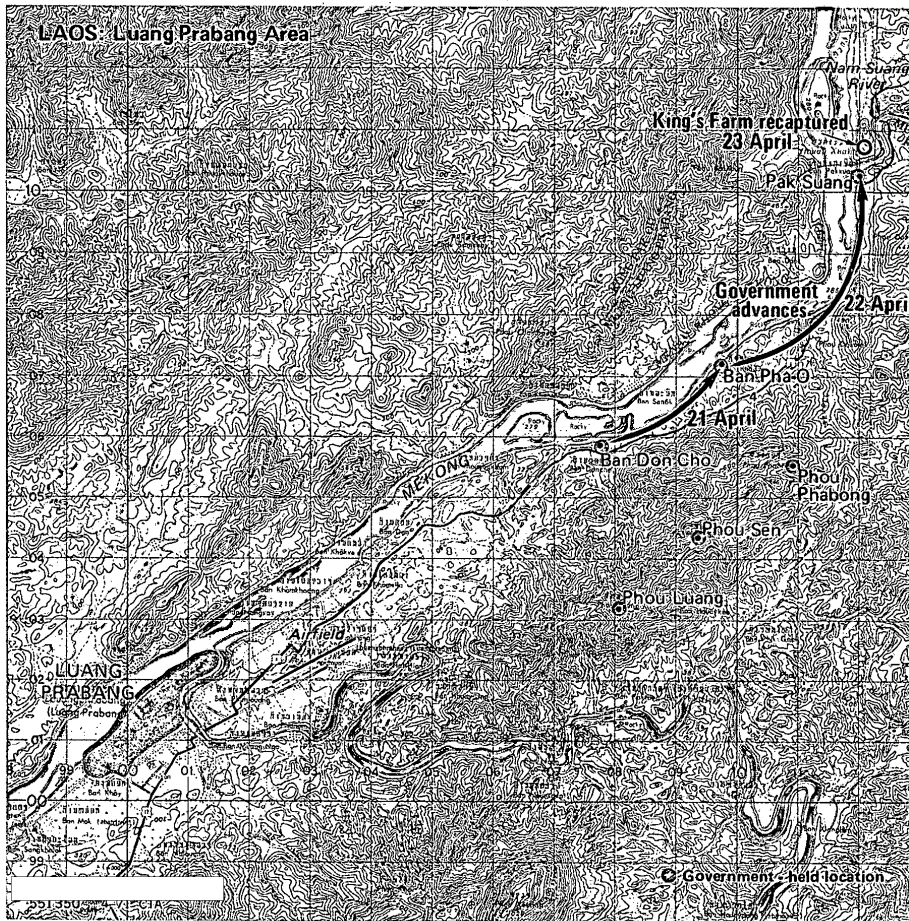
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Moscow wants to send high-ranking economic delegation to US next month. (Page 3)

Soyuz 10 docked with the Salyut vehicle. (Page 4)

Moscow delivers ten more MIG-21s to Cairo. (Page 4)

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LAOS

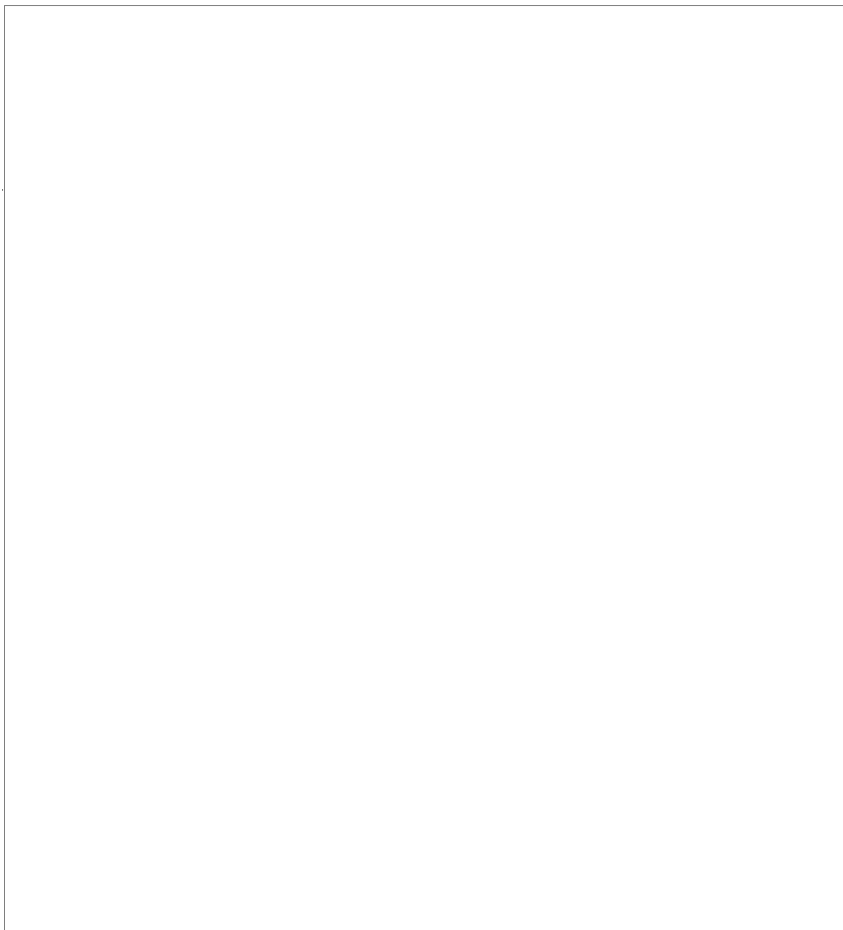
In their campaign to clear Communist units from the hills east of Luang Prabang, government irregulars have consolidated their hold on three positions overlooking the airfield. Government battalions have also substantially extended their control over Route 4 along the Mekong River, reaching the junction of the Mekong and Nam Suang rivers by Thursday. Yesterday, irregular units crossed to the northern bank of the Nam Suang and reoccupied the King's Farm which had been in enemy hands since 21 March.

Despite the government advances, the Communists are still in the area in considerable strength, and they may yet strike hard at the government battalions. The irregulars have been proceeding cautiously in anticipation of counterattacks. Although such caution seemed well warranted in the light of Communist intercepts early this week, enemy messages of the past few days have contained fewer references to plans for regaining the initiative. Government field commanders have also reported little resistance to their latest moves.

North Vietnamese units are known to have taken substantial losses during the past week, particularly in the area southeast of Pak Suang. In uncharacteristic fashion the North Vietnamese troops have also been abandoning weapons, a suggestion that they have been under unusually heavy pressure. Although it is too early to conclude that the threat to the Luang Prabang area has been dissipated, the Communists appear for the moment to be falling back to safer ground.

Elsewhere in Laos, there have been no major developments in recent days.

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USSR-US

On Thursday the Soviets began to make arrangements with the US for a visit of high-ranking economic officials whom they hope can arrive on 5 May. In addition to deputy ministers of foreign trade and state planning, the 14-man delegation will be composed largely of representatives of the motor vehicle and machine building industries.

The visit probably concerns Soviet attempts to obtain advanced technology and equipment for a heavy truck manufacturing complex to be built near the Kama River in the central USSR. The Soviets have been unsuccessful in persuading foreign companies, such as Renault, Daimler-Benz, and Fiat, to undertake construction of the plant. The delegation hopes to meet with officials of US corporations, like Mack Truck and Gleason Gears, with which the Soviets have conducted preliminary negotiations or taken soundings through intermediaries.

The delegation may also want to bring pressure through US businessmen on the administration for relaxation of licensing controls on the export of technologically advanced US machinery to the USSR. This could also explain the timing of the delegations's visit, as a US machine tool group is scheduled to travel to the USSR on 23 May.

The last-minute nature of the arrangements for the visit also suggests that Moscow may have broader political considerations in mind. The Soviets have been deeply disturbed by the recent turn of events in Sino-American relations, and they may hope to use the visit to offset Peking's gestures toward the US.

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NOTES

USSR: Soyuz 10, early in its second day in space, apparently rendezvoused and docked with the Salyut vehicle for two and one-half hours after which they separated. There are still no indications that additional launch operations are to be undertaken.

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USSR-Egypt: Moscow is continuing to shore up Cairo's defenses. Last week it delivered ten more MIG-21s for the Egyptian Air Force. Egypt has received over 60 late-model MIG-21s since the beginning of the year and a total of about 130 since they were first introduced in mid-1969. These aircraft are probably intended to replace older models, to flesh out Egypt's existing MIG-21 squadrons, and to replace training and other losses. The acute lack of qualified Egyptian pilots, however, continues to limit the use of these aircraft. These deliveries are in addition to the advanced aircraft which have recently appeared and which we believe are piloted by Soviets.

Cambodia: Discussions on forming a new government are continuing. The trio of figures

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--Sirik Matak, Son Ngoc Thanh, Son Sann--are still reported to be in line for key positions.

Haiti: The country continues quiet, with no signs of a threat to the government from either internal oppositionists or exiles.

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